THE TRAGIC ACCIDENT ON THE STANZA FIRE

The Stanza Fire was sparked by lightning on Monday, July 22, 2002, on the Klamath National Forest. Located 10 miles south of Happy Camp, California, the fire grew large quickly in the dry, steep, densely vegetated hillsides. In the early morning hours on July 28, five crewmembers of Lassen National Forest Engine 11 were doing a routine patrol along a road near the perimeter of the fire when their fire engine left the road, rolled down a steep embankment and into a ravine. Only two of the five crewmembers survived the plunge. They were transported via helicopter to Mercy Medical Center in Redding. Ryan Smith, 20, suffered serious injuries and Alex Glover, 19, was in fair condition. Both are now released from the hospital. Engine 11 was based at the Almanor Ranger District in Chester, California.

Condolences (cards and letters) for the families of the firefighters may be sent care of: Lassen National Forest, 2550 Riverside Drive, Susanville, California 96130, Attn: Family of Steve Oustad, Heather DePaolo, or John Self. Cards may also be sent to the forest for Ryan Smith or Alex Glover.

ABOUT THE FALLEN FIREFIGHTERS...

Steven Kent Oustad

Steven has been described by his family as fair, honest, gentle but strong, caring, sensitive, sharing, kind, talented, humorous, animated, responsible, capable, helpful, punctual, courteous, clean, and precise.

Steven Kent Oustad was born July 27, 1951, in Redwood City, California. His early education was completed at Morse and Sierra Elementary Schools in Sunnyvale, California and high school at Homestead High School in Cupertino, California. In high school Steve joined the theatrical group, and played in several successful productions, including "Oliver Twist."

After high school Steve and a friend purchased a Metre van and began an extended trip of the Pacific Northwest, the United States and Canada, which lead to beginning his interest in the outdoors.

After returning from this trip, Steven took up residence with his brother, David. Then after several odd jobs, wanderlust affected him again. He and John Hawkins went north and settled in Sterling City, where he purchased a house and gained a lot of experience remodeling and improving the house. He later founded the Sterling City Volunteer Fire Department and kept active with fire prevention until joining the USDA Forest Service.

Steve served approximately 25 years with the Forest Service beginning in 1978 on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. In 1979 we worked for the Forest Service in Butte Meadows until 1982. In 1982 he went to work for the Almanor Ranger District as a Fire Engine Operator and at the time of his death he was acting as Captain for Engine 11. He also served briefly for the Plumas National Forest as well.

Steve will be remembered by many for his silly wit and humor as well as his generous heart. He enjoyed the outdoors, spending time with his friends and family as well as traveling to Mexico during his off time. He was a very active member with the Westwood Community Theater Group where he spent seven years fulfilling his dream of being and actor.

Steven Oustad was the module leader of Engine 11. He is survived by parents Bjorn and Rosemary; brother David of San Jose; and sister Patty Glumac of San Jose.

Heather DePaolo

A biography about Heather DePaolo, written by reporter Maline Hazle, is a click away on the Redding *Record Searchlight* website:

<u>www.redding.com/top_stories/local/20020730toplo015.shtml</u>. This link was created with permission.

Heather DePaolo was the operator of Engine 11. She is survived by husband Sean Johnny of Redding; mother Sylvia Kratzke of Amherst, New York; father Tony of Charlotte, North Carolina; and brother Jeremy, of Monckscorner, South Carolina.

Fallen firefighter a 'remarkable human'

Brother mourns loss of Redding resident in crash near Happy Camp

Maline Hazle

Record Searchlight

July 30, 2002 — 2:12 a.m.

Heather Jane DePaolo always loved the west — whether it was the west side of Buffalo, N.Y., where she grew up, or the great expanses of the western United States that she discovered after college.

And the plucky 29-year-old was focused — once she made up her mind about something, she worked at it until it was finished.

With dual degrees in women's studies and Spanish, DePaolo had plenty of options when she graduated from New York's Syracuse University about seven years ago.

But then Heather DePaolo discovered firefighting and never looked back, her brother, Jeremey DePaolo, said Monday.

"She fell in love with fire and the West. Heather loved life and loved travel, but her greatest love was fire," said Jeremey DePaolo, her only sibling.

She and four other strike team members were checking a backfire that had been set on the Klamath National Forest south of Happy Camp when their truck plunged over the edge of a narrow mountain track, plummeting 800 feet down a rocky cliff.

Heather DePaolo and two others were killed. Two young firefighters with them survived.

"Our parents divorced when we were young. We were 1 years apart in age. She was my best friend in the whole world," Jeremey DePaolo, 30, said.

Jeremy DePaolo, second officer on a crude oil tanker, had just docked in Long Beach when he got the call notifying him of his sister's death.

He joined Heather's husband, U.S. Forest Service firefighter Sean Johnny, in Yreka on Monday.

Johnny and Heather DePaolo met on a fire and married last year in a ceremony in Brazil, Jeremy DePaolo said. Both were members of the elite Redding Interagency Hotshots last year, traveling to dozens of fires from California to Kentucky.

The couple recently had rented an apartment in Redding, where Heather looked forward to settling in after the fire season ended, her brother said.

"We both have itchy feet — we're used to living out of duffel bags," Jeremey DePaolo said. But Redding would be her home, at least during the off season.

A full-time employee with the Forest Service, Heather planned on a fire academy teaching job next year, said her brother.

Johnny asked Jeremy DePaolo to speak for him during Monday's telephone interview.

Blond, tall and slender, Heather was an attractive and athletic young woman, her brother said.

She combined brains with a work ethic that was amazing, he said.

The brother and sister both went to City Honors High School in Buffalo, the school where the "smart kids" went, Jeremey DePaolo recalled.

"Heather was a rebel in high school" who once dyed her hair green, said her brother. And when her mother told her to move out if she didn't like the rules, Heather did.

She was 16.

"She worked two jobs, . . . got her own apartment and finished high school," said Jeremey DePaolo. "She worked at an upscale Italian restaurant. Really, she was a gourmet chef."

Her grades won her scholarships that paid for 90 percent of her college tuition, said Jeremey DePaolo.

She traveled to Spain, to Costa Rica.

After college, Heather DePaolo joined AmeriCorps, sometimes referred to as the domestic Peace Corps, and that assignment brought her west.

She discovered snowboarding and worked at the Grand Canyon. She joined the Bureau of Land Management as an apprentice firefighter and she was hooked.

"She was like a rock star," her brother said. "She was number one in her academy class."

"There aren't a lot of full-time people in the Forest Service and she was one of them. It was her life.

"This was her life's calling. This is a tragedy. . . . She was a remarkable, remarkable human."

Reporter Maline Hazle can be reached at 225-8266 or at mhazle@redding.com.

Tuesday, July 30, 2002

John Self

John, or "Cowboy," was noted for his engaging smile, hard-working ethic, and leadership skills. Hunting, fishing, welding, horseback riding, and roping were high on his list of hobbies. Countless examples demonstrating his leadership qualities included Westwood High School football team captain and attaining "All League" status in the Feather River High School Football League for his ability as a quarterback and linebacker. Wrestling, baseball, pitching horseshoes, and rodeo also interested him.

While he was noted for his prowess in sports, he also won awards for other talents. During Westwood's annual Paul Bunyon Festival, Cowboy placed in the two-man handsaw and chokersetter events. He received the prestigious Lumberjack of the Year Award, where local merchants don winners with much recognition and a bundle of amenities.

Cowboy consistently made Westwood High School's honor roll. He also found time to take college classes three nights a week, umpire Little League games, and coach Powder Puff teams. He further shared his love and knowledge of sports as a school newspaper sports reporter.

Cowboy's supervisor at Medici Logging Company described him as, "incredibly hard working and full of surprises." As a firefighter for the Lassen National Forest's Almanor

Ranger District, he is remembered for his unwavering support of co-workers and helpful attitude.

During the July 30 memorial in his honor, it was overwhelmingly obvious by the testimonials that he impacted many lives during the three years he lived in the community. Cowboy's football and baseball coaches gave him high tribute by officially retiring the number on his jersey--22.

John Self was a firefighter on Engine 11. He is survived by his mother Gina of Westwood; father John of Fort Benning, Georgia; and sister Samantha of Winona, Mississippi.

Details of a joint memorial service to be held October 19, 2002, will be announced.